

2012

## Why Did the Trains Stop? The Two Year Cessation of Jewish Deportations from Slovakia

Anitra Van Prooyen

*University of Arkansas at Little Rock*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/papersandpubs>



Part of the [European History Commons](#), [History of Religion Commons](#), [Jewish Studies Commons](#), and the [Political History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Van Prooyen, Anitra (2012) "Why Did the Trains Stop? The Two Year Cessation of Jewish Deportations from Slovakia," *Papers & Publications: Interdisciplinary Journal of Undergraduate Research*: Vol. 1 , Article 5.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/papersandpubs/vol1/iss1/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities (CURCA) at Nighthawks Open Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Papers & Publications: Interdisciplinary Journal of Undergraduate Research by an authorized editor of Nighthawks Open Institutional Repository.

In March 1942 the fate of the Jews of Slovakia seemed sealed. As a protectorate of Nazi Germany, the Slovak Republic ordered the deportation of the region's Jews to "resettlement camps" in Poland. Yet only seven months later, the deportations had completely ceased and did not resume for two years. How did a country so eager to be rid of its Jewish population that it initially paid Germany to deport Jews change policy to such a radical degree?<sup>1</sup> Germany desired to present Slovakia as a successful and independent country and the liberal relationship it established with Slovak politicians was an essential component in diverting the objective to murder Slovakia's Jewish population.

Existing scholarship on these events has yielded several explanations for the two-year cessation of Jewish deportations. Joan Campion asserts that the bribery of Slovak and German officials by the underground Working Group was responsible for the halt in deportations.<sup>2</sup> Further, John Conway presents the theory that pressure from the Vatican and other religious leaders in Slovakia turned public opinion against the deportations.<sup>3</sup> On this subject, Ivan Kamenec emphasizes the importance of a series of exemptions put in place by the Slovak government to effect the halt.<sup>4</sup> Each of these authors makes a compelling argument in support of specific factors affecting Slovakian policy during this period. However, it is necessary to consider all of these factors to get a complete picture of the extraordinary actions of Slovakia from 1942-1944.

---

<sup>1</sup> Campion, Joan. *Gisi Fleishmann and the Jewish Fight For Survival*. Miami, Florida: Dvorion Books, 1983. P. 71

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. P. 4

<sup>3</sup> Conway, John S. "The Churches, the Slovak State and the Jews, 1933-1945." *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 1974: 85-112

<sup>4</sup> Kamenec, Ivan. *On the Trail of Tragedy: The Holocaust in Slovakia*. Bratislava, Slovakia: Hajko & Hajkova, 2007. P. 246

In order to understand the unique events in Slovakia, it is important to have some understanding of Slovak-Jewish relations prior to the tenuous independence Slovakia achieved as a protectorate of Nazi Germany. In 1939 there were few places in Europe, and most especially in Eastern Europe, where people of Jewish ancestry enjoyed the level of freedom and legal equality the Jews of Czechoslovakia did. Reacting to the radical stance of Czechoslovakia, a German newspaper declared, "...the bastion of world Jewry in Czechoslovakia must be destroyed."<sup>5</sup> While there were no legal restrictions on Slovak Jews, there was an understood and deeply rooted anti-Semitism in the region of Slovakia. The Jewish population accounted for only 4% of the overall Slovak population, but controlled 45% of the region's assets.<sup>6</sup> This was due in large part to the effects of the Hungarian Emancipation Act of 1867 and the Nationality Act of 1868. The emancipation act enfranchised Jews in the Hungarian Empire, while the Nationality Act refused to recognize any nationality other than Hungarian. This was part of efforts to suppress nationalist movements such as the rising nationalism in the Slovak region.<sup>7</sup> Because of these sanctions and the general population's refusal to deny their Slovak identity, economic advancement for Slovaks was difficult and the region was scornfully regarded as a land of poor peasants by most outsiders.<sup>8</sup> Jews were not considered a separate nationality and were not required to deny their culture or religion in order to avoid the economic restrictions. This resulted

---

<sup>5</sup> Kamenec, Ivan. *On the Trail of Tragedy: The Holocaust in Slovakia*. Bratislava, Slovakia: Hajko & Hajkova, 2007. P.33

<sup>6</sup> Ibid P.26-27

<sup>7</sup> Ibid P. 21

<sup>8</sup> Henederson, Alexander. *Eyewitness in Czecho-Slovakia*. London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1939. P. 272; Bauer, Yehuda. *Jews For Sale? Nazi-Jewish negotiations, 1933-1945*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994. P.62; Vrbova, Gerta. *Trust and Deceit: A Tale of Survival in Slovakia and Hungary, 1939-1945*. Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2010.

in their having a marked economic advantage over their Slovak neighbors with long-reaching effects, not the least of which were an economic dominance and a lingering and strong cultural anti-Semitism among Slovak nationalists.

Language was another barrier between the Jewish population and their Slovak neighbors. The majority of the Jews living in Slovakia did not speak Slovak. Even after Hungarian rule, the official language of Czechoslovakia was Czech, not Slovak, and the majority of business was conducted with German or Hungarian contacts or those in the more industrialized Czech region. Consequently, most Jews living in Slovakia spoke some combination of Czech, Hungarian and German.<sup>9</sup> Slovaks, fiercely preserving their unique culture and language, felt oppressed by all of those linguistic groups and tended to see Jews as the local face of far-away enemies.

Another contributing factor to anti-Semitism in the region was religion. Slovakia was a region of primarily orthodox Jews and devout Catholics. Bratislava, the capitol of the region, was considered a center of traditional Jewish culture and boasted the famous Pressburg Yeshiva. Religious intolerance toward Jews in Slovakia was significant due to the political sway the Catholic Church held over local politics. The ruling political party in the independent Slovak Republic was the Slovak People's Party (HSL'S) headed by Prime Minister and Catholic priest, Joseph Tiso.<sup>10</sup> Both the HSL'S and the other main political party, the Catholic People's Party, used a combination of religious and cultural anti-Semitism as a political weapon.

---

<sup>9</sup> Campion, Joan. *Gisi Fleishmann and the Jewish Fight For Survival*. Miami, Florida: Dvorion Books, 1983. P. 4; Kamenec, Ivan. *On the Trail of Tragedy: The Holocaust in Slovakia*. Bratislava, Slovakia: Hajko & Hajkova, 2007. P.26-27

<sup>10</sup> Ibid P. 19

While the Slovak region embraced anti-Semitic ideology, as the Slovak government embarked on its quest to solve “the Jewish problem” it did so with a much different mentality than that of Nazi Germany.<sup>11</sup> Slovak politicians presented the Jewish problem as limited to the disproportionate Jewish representation in the Slovak economy relative to their percentage of the region’s population. *Slovak*, the HSL’S’s newspaper, expressed it thus: “Only the percentage of Jews should sit at the honey pot as they formed and still form in Slovakia...Decent Jews should be left in peace and allowed to occupy the place appropriate to their percentage.”<sup>12</sup> As early as 1940, Slovakia began imposing restrictions upon Slovak Jews; one of the early restrictions was excluding Jews from public education. Public reaction to this, however, was negative. The main point of conflict was that the decree drew no distinction between practicing Jews and converted Jews. Shortly after it was enacted, therefore, amendments were made excluding Jews on religious grounds and also from education in certain trade schools, setting an important precedent.<sup>13</sup>

The state of the Slovak economy was the primary fuel for the spread of anti-Semitism in the region and represented an important and persistent factor in whether or not the deportation trains stopped in 1942. The position Jews in Slovakia held in the region’s economy was pivotal in forming public opinion. While it did not slow the passage of anti-Semitic law, it did in some

---

<sup>11</sup> Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York: Penguin Books, 1992. P.203

<sup>12</sup> Kamenec, Ivan. *On the Trail of Tragedy: The Holocaust in Slovakia*. Bratislava, Slovakia: Hajko & Hajkova, 2007. P.45

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid* P. 114-115

cases slow its implementation and limit its application.<sup>14</sup> The weakness of the Slovak economy was a tool later used by Jewish organizations to save lives.

The Slovak Republic was one of the first satellites to come under the sway of Nazi Germany, who intended to present it as a successful and independent country to the rest of the world. It was very important that Slovakia conform to the policies of the Reich but equally important that Slovakia not appear to be forced.<sup>15</sup> For this reason, Germany had a limited presence in the region and used diplomatic negotiation rather than force.

Part of the diplomatic process was the appointment of advisors to the Slovak government; chief among these was German representative to Slovakia, Hauptsturmführer Dieter Wisliceny. When Wisliceny arrived in 1940, one of the first things he encouraged the Slovaks to do was establish a separate institution specifically tasked with creating and implementing anti-Jewish policy. By November of 1940 the Central Economic Office (CEO) had enacted a series of edicts that came to be known as the Jewish Codex. This was primarily a series of economic sanctions intended to limit the ability of Jews to work or do business, while simultaneously stripping away Jewish property and placing it in the hands of “Aryan” Slovaks.<sup>16</sup> Germany was dissatisfied with the fact that it exempted some Jews, namely, converted Jews and their families, professionals needed for economic reasons, and young people needed for labor in work camps, but Germany addressed the issue of the exemptions with diplomatic pressure on Slovak politicians.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Frieder, Emmanuel. *To Deliver Their Souls: The Struggle of a Young Rabbi During the Holocaust*. New York: Holocaust Publications, 1987. P.42-43

<sup>15</sup> Holotík, Ľudovít. *The Slovak National Uprising and the Czechoslovak Revolution, 1944-1948*. Bratislava: Publishing House of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, 1985. P. 75-76

<sup>16</sup> Ibid P. 126-132

<sup>17</sup> Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York: Penguin Books, 1992. P.203

Germany's commitment to diplomacy is evidenced in an incident occurring in 1939. A group of German soldiers "impatient that the Jewish problem was not being solved, stopped passers-by in the streets whom they took to be Jews and ordered them to return to the Jewish quarter of town."<sup>18</sup> Slovak police intervened, using firearms and truncheons to subdue and arrest five of the Germans involved. This event speaks to the unique autonomy and tolerance enjoyed by Slovakia as a protectorate of Nazi Germany and sets an important early precedent in German-Slovak relations.

The influence of the Catholic Church on public opinion was significant and while it tolerated and in some cases encouraged forms of anti-Semitism, it for the most part rejected the racial view of anti-Semitism. In Sicherheitsdienst (SD)<sup>19</sup> reports on the political situation and leanings of Slovakia written in May of 1940, one officer states, "A final solution of the Jewish question in Slovakia will in particular be opposed by the Catholic Church, which under the disguise of love of one's neighbor and other humanitarian sentiments, hinders any decisive steps against the plague of Jewry in Slovakia."<sup>20</sup> In 1940 the German Foreign Ministry reported the slow and inconsistent enforcement of anti-Jewish law. A report complains, "the Jewish question is not being brought closer to a solution in any way."<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> *The New York Times*. "Slovaks and Germans Clash in Bratislava." May 12, 1939: 11

<sup>19</sup> The SD was an intelligence agency whose establishment preceded that of the Gestapo and was similar in nature. The SD was tasked with seeking out potential enemies and subversives through a network of agents and informants within the military, Germany and its occupied territories and satellites. For more information please see: Browder, George C., *Foundations of the Nazi Police State – The Formation of Sipo and SD*, University of Kentucky, Lexington, 1990.

<sup>20</sup> Conway, John S. "The Churches, the Slovak State and the Jews, 1933-1945." *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 1974: 85-112

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

In early 1942, within German borders, the German policy with regard to Jews had shifted from a mass forced expulsion to an even more extreme form of ethnic cleansing. Far from encouraging immigration, Germany sought to close all borders and systematically kill every Jew in Europe. Its first step to implementing this policy in its protectorate territories was to deport Jews into Germany where the deaths could be carried out under the guise of work camps. When presented with these intensified policies, Wisliceny approached Slovak leaders about the deportation of young men and women to a labor colony. In reality the deportees were destined for Auschwitz. The Slovaks worried that expelling only young men and women would leave the children and aged as dependents on the government and substantial Jewish assets in German hands. The Slovaks agreed to the deportations, but only if they retained the right to any Jewish property and if Germany agreed that the remaining members of the deported Jews' families would be deported, too.

Germany initially rejected these stipulations but later negotiated an agreement. The Slovaks would take control of all the assets left behind by Jews deported from Slovakia and in return the Slovak Republic would pay 500 marks to the German government for each Jew deported. Germany argued that this was to reimburse funds used to support the Jews during their non-productive assimilation and training period.<sup>22</sup>

Jews from Nitra and Tyrnau were some of the first to be sent to Auschwitz<sup>23</sup> and participated in the construction of Birkenau, an addition to the camp built to ease congestion in

---

<sup>22</sup> Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York: Penguin Books, 1992. P.203

<sup>23</sup> Auschwitz concentration camp was the largest of Germany's concentration camps and consisted of three main camps and approximately 45 sub camps located near the Polish-Slovak border. The three main camps were Auschwitz I, Auschwitz II-Birkenau, and Auschwitz III-Monowitz. Auschwitz I was an existing structure whose original use was as a training facility for the Polish Army. Auschwitz II-Birkenau was built by slave labor under the



the main camp.<sup>24</sup> After meeting Germany's initial demand for young strong workers, the Slovaks arranged the continued deportations according to the same policies it applied to the Jewish Codex. Those who had converted to some form of Christianity were spared as well as those engaged in work which was considered vital to the Slovak economy. Amazingly, the majority of the workers so designated were located in concentration work camps that were for the most part organized by Jews. The Working Group,<sup>25</sup> an unofficial Jewish organization formed to help protect Jews from anti-Semitic forces, had for some time exploited every means of ensuring the survival of the Jewish people of Slovakia. One of the tactics used by the Working Group to stop Jewish deportations was to prove to those in the Slovak government charged with expanding the economy that Jews were a vital asset to their cause.

The first deportations from Slovakia took place on March 26, 1942. By April, Ondrej Steiner had collaborated with Dr. Isidor Koso, one of many Slovak officials who cooperated with the Working Group. Together, Steiner and Koso established the first versions of Jewish labor camps, which would be guarded by Slovak troops but governed internally by the Jewish inmates. The camps would be production centers for needed items such as furniture and textiles. Steiner reasoned that if Jews could prove themselves a valuable economic asset, the government would

---

direction of German officials and is where the large gas chambers and crematoria were located. Auschwitz III-Monowitz was the largest of the slave labor camps and was responsible for the production of synthetic rubber. For further information, please see Dlugoborski, Waclaw, and Franciszek Piper, Eds. *Auschwitz 1940-1945. Central Issues in the History of the Camp*. The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2000.

<sup>24</sup> Frieder, Emmanuel. *To Deliver Their Souls: The Struggle of a Young Rabbi During the Holocaust*. New York: Holocaust Publications, 1987. P. 44

<sup>25</sup> The Working Group was an unofficial Jewish organization established by members of the official *Judenrat*, the state sponsored Jewish administrative organization. The members recognized the danger posed to Slovakia's Jewish population and formed in order to pursue unsanctioned and illegal actions that might save lives. They are best known for their frequent bribing of both German and Slovak officials. For more information, please see Bauer, Yehuda, *Jews for Sale? Nazi-Jewish Negotiations, 1933-1945*. Yale University Press, 1996.

resist deporting them. Though this scheme was strongly opposed by Sano Mach, one of the few truly racist anti-Semites in the Slovak government, Koso was able to successfully argue for the continued existence of the camps.<sup>26</sup> A further strong economic incentive to stopping the trains was the fact that Germany continued to charge the Slovak Republic 500 marks per Jew deported, a price that even the appropriation of Jewish property could not adequately subsidize.

The vast majority of people in Slovakia were initially convinced that the deported Jews were being relocated to working camps. Chava Livni recalled, “We just thought, they are being taken away to work.”<sup>27</sup> As the trains continued to deport Jews by the thousands, more and more objections began to be raised, and the religious leaders of both the Protestant and Catholic churches sent protests to the Slovak government. The Vatican, infamous for its overly diplomatic and insufficient protests, uncharacteristically wrote concerning reports of the deportations, “The Secretariat of State would like to believe that such reports [of the killing of departed Jews] are unfounded...being unable to presume that in such a state, which purports to be governed by Christian principles, such grave measures could be put into effect.”<sup>28</sup> Even the Ministry of Transportation, the very ministry at that time responsible for carrying out the deportations, complained, stating it was willing to employ Jewish workers and, because of their absence, a significant amount of maintenance and investment work had ceased.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Campion, Joan. *Gisi Fleishmann and the Jewish Fight For Survival*. Miami, Florida: Dvorion Books, 1983. P. 66

<sup>27</sup> Ibid P. 58

<sup>28</sup> Conway, John S. "The Churches, the Slovak State and the Jews, 1933-1945." *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 1974: 85-112

<sup>29</sup> Kamenec, Ivan. *On the Trail of Tragedy: The Holocaust in Slovakia*. Bratislava, Slovakia: Hajko & Hajkova, 2007. P.211

On March 25, 1942, the SD reported to Berlin that Vatican intervention had been “sharp and pointed.” The Vatican had gone so far as to summon the Slovak ambassador and request instant action on the part of the Slovak government to stop the deportations.<sup>30</sup> The report went on to state that “all the Catholic bishops, the Slovak Protestant bishops, and the bishop of the Greek Uniate Church...have directed a memorandum to President Tiso and a similar one to the Slovak government.” The report describes the bishop’s “unbelievable tone” and expresses indignation by certain statements such as, “we seek to remind the Slovak government that these are God’s creatures” and “the deportation of Christian Catholic souls [i.e. the baptized Jews] to pagan Germany constitutes a moral sin, which we are resolved the Slovak people must be spared.”<sup>31</sup> The Lutheran bishops protested in a letter issued May 20, 1942, stating that the laws of God protect “the honour [sic] of the Jews as human beings, so that not one of them should feel deprived because of his national, religious or racial attachments...To our sorrow we have been compelled to witness deeds which...are contrary to human feelings, to justice and to the law of God; they are in no way related to love.” The bishop’s letters were confiscated but due to inspired planning immediately broadcast in Slovak via the BBC.<sup>32</sup>

In June the SD reported that the deportation of Jews was very unpopular with the Slovak population and blamed this unpopularity on the clerics and “English propaganda.”<sup>33</sup> The pressure was so significant that Prime Minister Tiso specifically requested that he not be told anything

---

<sup>30</sup> Conway, John S. "The Churches, the Slovak State and the Jews, 1933-1945." *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 1974: 85-112

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Conway, John S. "The Churches, the Slovak State and the Jews, 1933-1945." *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 1974: 85-112

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

about the deportations. An SD report states a fear expressed by Mach that Tiso would not be able to stand up to the pressure of the clerics. Another speaks of Tuka's loyalty to the cause but states that he was thwarted by "clever maneuvering."<sup>34</sup>

The clever maneuvering to which the report referred is almost certainly the efforts of the Working Group. The Working Group reached out with appeals to the morality and compassion of some government officials but more often with bribes. For example, Josef Sivak towed the party line with regard to the Jews well enough to "pass muster" but was in fact also a close friend of Rabbi Frieder, a member of the Working Group. Sivak was appointed Minister of Education and Culture and gave Frieder a secret phone number that allowed them to stay in direct contact. He warned the Working Group of planned measures and during the deportations did what he could to ensure Jewish schoolmasters were excluded.<sup>35</sup>

In other cases, it was necessary to bribe officials, as was the case with the head of the president's bureau, Dr. Isidor Koso. In fact, it was from Koso that the Working Group first learned of the planned deportations. They responded by quickly putting forward the plan for Steiner's labor camps but feared that by the time the camps were fully established, there would be no Jews left. They then sought to bribe the head of Department 14, the government department in charge of solving "the Jewish question" in Slovakia, Dr. Anton Vasek, "the Jew King." They not only appealed to his bank account but also to his vanity, encouraging him to write a book about his fascinating life in politics. This was so successful that Vasek arranged for several transports already scheduled to leave the country to encounter technical difficulties that caused lengthy delays. Koso and Vasek seem to be examples of Slovak officials that were

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

<sup>35</sup> Campion, Joan. *Gisi Fleishmann and the Jewish Fight For Survival*. Miami, Florida: Dvorion Books, 1983. P. 53

described as wanting “money, motor-cars, resounding title’s [sic], and the maximum of personal pomp and circumstance. They seem to have been quite indifferent to the means by which these things were obtained.”<sup>36</sup>

The Working Group’s attempts to bribe the Slovak officials produced such success that the Group even went so far as to meet with the German representative Dieter Wisliceny. They enlisted a corrupt member of the official Jewish Committee named Hochberg, who was familiar with Wisliceny, to present the equivalent of \$40,000 as a bribe to the German. Hochberg pocketed half of the sum and only presented Wisliceny with \$20,000.<sup>37</sup> However, the German accepted that amount immediately before a scheduled visit to Berlin for consultation.

During this visit he once again presented demands made by Slovak officials that they be allowed to send representatives to verify the conditions of the Jewish deportees. Before the bribe, Wisliceny had already sent Fritz Fiala, the editor of the Slovak newspaper *Grenzbote*, to Auschwitz, knowing Fiala would write a report that would encourage continued support of the deportations. Fiala met with a specially selected, groomed and dressed group of Jewish prisoners for photographs.<sup>38</sup> These were to be published with a piece of propaganda that was amazing in its audacity and designed not only to denigrate fears regarding the true happenings within Auschwitz but also to further defame the Jewish people. The articles had only limited success.

---

<sup>36</sup> Henederson, Alexander. *Eyewitness in Czecho-Slovakia*. London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1939. P. 304

<sup>37</sup> Hochberg was later detained by Slovak officials and, during the Slovak National Uprising, was captured by Jewish partisans and shot. Campion, Joan. *Gisi Fleishmann and the Jewish Fight For Survival*. Miami, Florida: Dvorion Books, 1983. P. 67-69

<sup>38</sup> "The Trial of Adolf Eichmann: Session 50." *The Nizkor Project*. <http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/Sessions/Session-050-07.html> (accessed March 14, 2010).

Slovak clerics dismissed them and Slovak officials continued to insist that the articles were insufficient and demanded an official delegation be sent.

On this trip to Berlin after he had received the bribe, Wisliceny made a more honest attempt to get the request granted. However, he was informed finally that this was impossible because most of the Jews deported from Slovakia were already dead. It is believed that this was the meeting in which Eichmann informed Wisliceny of the new murderous focus of Nazi policy to which Wisliceny famously replied, “May God forbid that our enemies should ever do anything similar to the German people.”<sup>39</sup>

It remains impossible to determine whether the Working Group’s effort was successful. It was thought that Wisliceny might have the authority on the German side of the equation to slow or stop the deportations and would consent to do so if bribed.<sup>40</sup> While it is true that Wisliceny accepted the bribe and the deportations stopped almost immediately, there were many other factors at work. The last transports of deported Jews to leave the country for the next two years were the two that were stalled by Vasek’s “temporary difficulties.”<sup>41</sup>

Wisliceny continued to appear to cooperate with the Working Group, even going so far as to report upcoming activities that might lead to the resumption of the deportations. Steiner, Wisliceny’s primary contact, became so emboldened by his manner and continued cooperation he once asked Wisliceny, “if he so much wanted to help the Jews why was he in charge of the

---

<sup>39</sup> Campion, Joan. *Gisi Fleishmann and the Jewish Fight For Survival*. Miami, Florida: Dvorion Books, 1983. P. 68

<sup>40</sup> Steinberg, Lucien. *Not As A Lamb: The Jews Against Hitler*. Glasgow: The University Press, 1974. P. 295

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* P. 69

expulsions?” to which Wisliceny reportedly replied that he was not an anti-Semite but was doing his duty as a German soldier.<sup>42</sup>

Steiner continued to work with Wisliceny and also to work on improving and expanding the Jewish labor camps which became more and more important to the Slovak economy.<sup>43</sup> These camps differed so greatly from the concentration and labor camps in Germany and Poland that Edith Katz, an imprisoned 21 year old Jewish woman with a heart condition, was transferred to the camp at Novaky because it was thought the environment would be better for her health.<sup>44</sup> Meanwhile, cultural activities were encouraged within the camps, and members of the Working Group, namely Y.O. Neumann and Steiner, were successful in sneaking weapons into the camps intended for the inmates’ self-defense.<sup>45</sup>

The efforts of the Working Group to make the Jews an essential asset to the Slovak economy were successful. The religious community succeeded in turning a significant portion of public opinion against renewed deportations. The Working Group bribed certain officials, distracted others with appeals to their vanity, and convinced others with appeals to their humanity.<sup>46</sup> Though there were many efforts made to renew the deportation of Jews from the region of Slovakia, they were all met with opposition and failed. When concrete plans were

---

<sup>42</sup> Fuchs, Abraham. *The Unheeded Cry*. Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1984. P. 107-108

<sup>43</sup> Campion, Joan. *Gisi Fleishmann and the Jewish Fight for Survival*. Miami, Florida: Dvorion Books, 1983. P. 75

<sup>44</sup> Steinberg, Lucien. *Not As A Lamb: The Jews Against Hitler*. Glasgow: The University Press, 1974. P. 296

<sup>45</sup> Campion, Joan. *Gisi Fleishmann and the Jewish Fight For Survival*. Miami, Florida: Dvorion Books, 1983. P. 75; Kamenec, Ivan. *On the Trail of Tragedy: The Holocaust in Slovakia*. Bratislava, Slovakia: Hajko & Hajkova, 2007. P. 321-322

<sup>46</sup> Ibid P. 290

presented, politicians openly opposed them.<sup>47</sup> Roman Catholic bishops issued a pastoral letter read in all the Catholic churches of a country that was 80% Catholic, decrying the attempt to resume deportations.<sup>48</sup>

When at last the deportation of Jews began south of Slovakia in Hungary, Slovak officials worked to exempt Slovak Jews living in that country from the deportation actions. This infuriated both Hungary and Germany. The German ambassador, E. Veessenmayer, sent a complaint to the Berlin Foreign Office stating the Slovak Embassy and other Slovak authorities had “a special interest in the release and repatriation of arrested Jews with Slovak citizenship, which not only disturbs and hinders the progress of the action...but especially...is giving the Hungarian government the impression that the Slovak government...hold an essentially opposing position on the Jewish question.” At the same time, many pro-Nazi Slovaks hoped that the events in Hungary would spur the resumption of deportations in Slovakia. They were thus understandably disappointed when Mach, previously one of the staunchest supporters of resuming the deportations, announced, “if the Jews do not provoke and force us...we will not deport them.”<sup>49</sup>

Unfortunately, the Jews of Slovakia did not have the chance to provoke the Slovak government. In August of 1944, there was a rebellion against the HSL'S government and by extension the German government. Slovak partisans were encouraged to revolt by Russian

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid P. 287

<sup>48</sup> Ibid P. 289

<sup>49</sup> Ibid P. 298-299



authorities who promised military support.<sup>50</sup> With Germany's faring so badly on the Eastern front and the assurances of the Russians, the Slovaks believed they could succeed. They were wrong. Germany, finally freed of diplomatic restraint, attacked in force and quickly quelled the rebellion. 20,000 Jews, almost all which remained in the Slovak Republic, were deported in October and November of 1944. Most of them never returned.

All of the efforts to both stop the deportation trains and keep them from resuming were significant. The influence of the Vatican and both the Catholic and Protestant church was substantial in directing public opinion against the deportations. By providing significant economic incentives, both personal and political, to Slovak and German politicians, the actions of the often marginalized Working Group were undeniable contributing factors in the halt of deportations. The actions of these groups were seldom conducted in conjunction with each other but nevertheless worked together, placing pressure on Slovak officials to create more and more exemptions.

Yet, the most startling and arguably most important contributor to the halt of deportations remains Germany itself. Few of the other influences and factors previously discussed would have succeeded or even been possible had Germany not allowed Slovakia an unprecedented amount of autonomy. The most compelling evidence for the importance of Germany's diplomatic policies in the thwarting of its own goals is the fact that the deportation of Jewish Slovaks only resumed when Germany abandoned that diplomacy.

---

<sup>50</sup> Vrbova, Gerta. *Trust and Deceit: A Tale of Survival in Slovakia and Hungary, 1939-1945*. Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2010. P. 92-93

## Bibliography

Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York: Penguin Books, 1992.

Bauer, Yehuda. *Jews For Sale? Nazi-Jewish negotiations, 1933-1945*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.

Campion, Joan. *Gisi Fleishmann and the Jewish Fight For Survival*. Miami, Florida: Dvorion Books, 1983.

Conway, John S. "The Churches, the Slovak State and the Jews, 1933-1945." *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 1974: 85-112.

Frieder, Emmanuel. *To Deliver Their Souls: The Struggle of a Young Rabbi During the Holocaust*. New York: Holocaust Publications, 1987.

Fuchs, Abraham. *The Unheeded Cry*. Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1984.

Henederson, Alexander. *Eyewitness in Czecho-Slovakia*. London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1939.

Holotík, Ludovít. *The Slovak National Uprising and the Czechoslovak Revolution, 1944-1948*. Bratislava: Publishing House of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, 1985.

Jurík, Jozef. *EIC Electronické Informačné Centrum*. 2007.

<http://www.pramen.info/c/1424/slovensko-1918-1945---cast-iv---ustavny-system--antisemitizmus-a-riesenie-zidovskej-otazky.htm> (accessed March 27, 2010).

Kamenec, Ivan. *On the Trail of Tragedy: The Holocaust in Slovakia*. Bratislava, Slovakia: Hajko & Hajkova, 2007.

Steinberg, Lucien. *Not As A Lamb: The Jews Against Hitler*. Glasgow: The University Press, 1974.

*The New York Times*. "Slovaks and Germans Clash in Bratislava." May 12, 1939: 11.

*The New York Times*. "Slovaks Curb Jews' Property." June 23, 1939: 12.

"The Trial of Adolf Eichmann: Session 50." *The Nizkor Project*.

<http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/Sessions/Session-050-07.html> (accessed November 14, 2009).

Vnuk, Frantisek. *Dr. Joseph Tiso, President of the Slovak Republic in commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of his death at the hands of the enemies of Slovak independence*. Sydney: The Association of Australian Slovaks, 1967.

Vrbova, Gerta. *Trust and Deceit: A Tale of Survival in Slovakia and Hungary, 1939-1945*. Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2010.